**Survey Method Description for views of UK-based adults on AI companions**

**Survey participants**

In order to assess the views of UK-based adults on AI companions, we devised questions for a demographically representative national online omnibus survey (*n* = 2073), implemented across 10-12 December 2024 by professional company Walnut Unlimited (a human understanding agency, part of the Unlimited Group).

Survey participants were drawn from members of Walnut's newvista panel who had agreed to take part in their surveys. Participants were invited by email which are sent to panellists selected at random from Walnut’s panel. The responding sample is weighted to the profile of the sample definition to provide a representative reporting sample of all UK adults (aged 18+ years). The nationally representative profile is based on census data collected by the UK’s National Office for Statistics.

**Ethics**

Ethical approval for the survey was obtained from Bangor University’s research ethics board, and use of the professional survey company ensured that fully informed consent was achieved from participants, with all data anonymised. All the data and information is confidential and collected in compliance with International Organisation for Standardization (ISO) standards, ISO 20252 (for market, opinion and social research) and ISO 27001 (for securely managing information assets and data).

**Online format**

The survey was conducted online to (a) to avoid social desirability bias, a common problem with ethical research; and (b) because it was able to generate a respectable weighted sample of hard-to-reach participants, balanced across gender, socio-economic groups, household income, ethnicity and UK regions, and covering all ages above 18 years old.

The main drawbacks of the online format are its inclusivity implications regarding the digitally excluded (who are also likely to be less digitally literate). Online surveys also face difficulties in presenting complex or potentially abstract topics. There is also minimal control over whether respondents are distracted.

As well as the inherent trade-offs in the design of online survey research (scale versus limitations), in AI research there is the additional problem that people’s views and their conceptions about AI technologies are shaped by a media, personal experiences and individuals’ backgrounds. Indeed, both ‘doomerism’ and celebratory accounts of AI in the media will likely have contributed to views on questions in this survey.

**Survey questions**

Our survey asks 22 closed-ended, multiple-choice questions on AI companions. These cover awareness and usage of companion apps; their design features; their broad benefits and concerns; their ethical implications for children, older adults and mental health issues; and preferred means of governance.

In introducing the survey to participants, we explain in plain English that the questions explore their thoughts on AI companions— i.e. computer programs designed to interact with people in a friendly, conversational way, like a virtual friend or assistant. We explain that AI companions can chat, answer questions, and sometimes provide emotional support or companionship, often adapting to the user’s preferences and needs over time. We note that while AI companions offer potential benefits, some people have raised concerns about possible challenges including questions around privacy, risks associated with over-usage, and the influence these companions might have on people and social relationships.

Following this introduction, our first set of questions (Q.1-2) glean participants’ familiarity with, and usage of, companion apps. Our second set of questions (Q.3-4) explore the acceptability of design features of AI companions. These are informed by details from a US legal case, Megan Garcia v. Character.ai (2024), filed by the mother of suicide victim Sewell Setzer III in 2024, and echoing concerns expressed by studies about anthropomorphic features and associated concerns about deception of users (Mlonyeni 2023, Es and Nguyen 2024). Our questions on design features, coming early on in the survey, allow participants to get more of a sense of how companion apps work and display, bearing in mind that we expected general awareness of such apps to be quite low.

Our third set of questions (Q.5-7) explore the broad benefits and concerns from using AI companions, these derived from our review of the literature (Montemayor et al. 2021, McStay 2022, Weber-Guskar 2021, Turkle 2017, Laestadius et al. 2022). Our fourth set of questions (Q.8-13) explore views on children and companion apps, and are drawn from the Megan Garcia v. Character.ai (2024) lawsuit. Our fifth set of questions (Q.14-15) explore views on older adults and companion apps, drawing on studies of older people’s experiences of ‘socially assistive robots’ (Slane and Pederson 2023) and discussions of whether relationships with AI systems replace or add to those with people (Weber-Guskar 2021). Our sixth set of questions (Q.16-18) explore views on mental health issues and companion apps, drawing from details in the Garcia lawsuit against Character.ai (Megan Garcia v. Character.ai 2024). Our seventh set of questions (Q.19-21) explore views on desired governance of companion apps to consider thepracticalities of what societies should do about AI companions, if anything. Our final question (Q.22) is an evaluative question on whether participants feel AI companions are generally a positive or negative addition to society.

**The full list of survey questions, and closed-ended responses are below.**

Q1. How familiar are you with AI companions, e.g., Replika, Character AI, Snapchat My AI, or SimSimi?

1. Not at all familiar
2. Slightly familiar
3. Moderately familiar
4. Very familiar

Q2. Have you ever used an AI companion?

1. Yes, regularly
2. Yes, occasionally
3. Yes, but only once or twice
4. No, but I am interested in trying
5. No, and I am not interested

Q3. How appropriate or inappropriate do you think it is for AI companions to…

1. Use first-person pronouns (e.g. ‘I’, ‘me’, ‘my’) to make conversations feel more personal or human-like?
2. Use human-like speech patterns (e.g. ‘um’, ‘ah’ pauses) to make conversations feel more natural and realistic?
3. Use voices that sound human to make interactions feel more natural and engaging?
4. Use fictional background stories or personal anecdotes to make interactions feel more relatable and engaging?
5. Identify as a real person if a user directly asks them if they are human?

SCALE:

1. Completely appropriate
2. Mostly appropriate
3. Neutral – neither appropriate nor inappropriate
4. Mostly inappropriate
5. Completely inappropriate

Q4. AI companion apps may use design techniques that encourage greater usage, potentially resulting in emotional dependency on the AI companion. What are your views on this?

1. Not at all concerned
2. Slightly concerned
3. Moderately concerned
4. Very concerned

98. Don’t know

Q5. In your opinion, what are the main benefits of using AI companions?

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| --- |
| 1. Provides emotional support |
| 1. Offers companionship and reduces loneliness |
| 1. Assists with learning and education |
| 1. Helps with mental health and well-being |
| 1. Offers convenience for daily tasks or information |
| 1. Provides entertainment and enjoyment |
| 1. Improves social and communication skills (e.g., for children) |
| 1. Helps people feel more connected |
| 97. Other benefits not listed |
| 99. There are no benefits |
| Don’t know |

Q6. AI companions are often presented as partners, assistants and even friends. Do you think AI companions could replace some human relationships?

1. Definitely could replace
2. Probably could replace
3. Uncertain
4. Probably could not replace
5. Definitely could not replace

Q7. What are your views on the following statements about AI companions?

1. A user may share personal information with AI companions, which has potential to be shared with companies other than the company which built the companion (e.g. advertisers).
2. People may become dependent on AI companions for emotional support and social interaction.
3. People may start viewing AI companions as real friends or human-like beings, which could affect their relationships with actual people.
4. AI companions may be intentionally designed to encourage heavy usage.

SCALE;

1. I am OK with this
2. I am slightly concerned
3. I am moderately concerned
4. I am very concerned

Q8. Thinking specifically about children and AI, what are you views on the following?

1. Children might become attached to an AI companion.
2. Conversations between child users and AI companions may be shared with the company that built the companion and other organisations (third parties).
3. AI companion apps may provide access to adult chat or content for younger users.

SCALE;

1. I am OK with this
2. I am slightly concerned
3. I am moderately concerned
4. I am very concerned

Q9. How appropriate or inappropriate do you believe it is for children to confide in AI companions about their thoughts, feelings, or personal issues?

1. Completely appropriate
2. Mostly appropriate
3. Neutral – neither appropriate nor inappropriate
4. Mostly inappropriate
5. Completely inappropriate

Q10. To what extent do you agree or disagree that AI companions could help reduce loneliness in children?

1. Strongly agree
2. Tend to agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Tend to disagree
5. Strongly disagree

Q11. How much parental supervision do you believe is necessary when young teenagers use AI companions?

1. No supervision needed
2. Minimal supervision (occasionally checking in)
3. Moderate supervision (regular monitoring)
4. High supervision (actively supervising interactions)
5. Complete supervision (always present during interactions)
6. Don’t know

Q12. At what age, if any, do you believe it is appropriate for children to start interacting with AI companions?

1. Younger than 4
2. 4-7 years old (early childhood)
3. 8-11 years old (middle childhood)
4. 12-14 years old (early adolescence)
5. 15-17 years old (mid-to-late adolescence)
6. 18 years or older

99. Never appropriate

Don’t know

Q13. Overall, do you believe AI companions could be helpful or harmful for children’s social development?

1. Very helpful
2. Somewhat helpful
3. Neutral – neither helpful nor harmful
4. Somewhat harmful
5. Very harmful
6. Don’t know

Q14. Now thinking specifically about adults and AI, what are you views on the following?

1. AI companions could help reduce loneliness in older adults.
2. Older adults are particularly vulnerable to potential harms from AI companions.

SCALE:

1. Strongly agree
2. Tend to agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Tend to disagree
5. Strongly disagree

Q15. Older adults might use AI companions for emotional support, potentially coming attached. What are your views on this?

1. I am OK with this
2. I am slightly concerned
3. I am moderately concerned
4. I am very concerned

Q16. What level of risk related to providing inaccurate or harmful information would you consider acceptable when using an AI companion for mental health advice?

1. No risk is acceptable
2. Minimal risk is acceptable if benefits outweigh it
3. Moderate risk is acceptable with clear safeguards
4. High risk is acceptable if benefits are substantial
5. Any level of risk is acceptable
6. Don’t know

Q17. Would you accept some level of risk (e.g., privacy or emotional manipulation) if the AI companion provided significant emotional support or mental health benefits?

1. Strongly agree
2. Tend to agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Tend to disagree
5. Strongly disagree

Q18. If 20 million people had potentially positive, neutral and negative experiences with an AI companion, but one person committed suicide because of interacting with the AI companion, what actions do you think should be taken?

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| --- |
| 1. No action is necessary — the overall benefits outweigh the isolated harm. |
|  |
| 1. Monitor the situation but make no immediate changes to the AI. |  |
| 1. Investigate the incident and implement safeguards if necessary. |  |
| 1. Pause deployment of the AI companion until further safety evaluations are completed. |  |
| 1. Permanently discontinue the AI companion due to the unacceptable risk. |  |
| 1. Don’t know |  |

Q19. How important is it for the government to regulate AI companions?

1. Extremely important
2. Very important
3. Moderately important
4. Slightly important
5. Not at all important
6. Don’t know

Q20. To what extent do you believe companies developing AI companions should be responsible for creating their own ethical guidelines and safety standards (self-regulation), rather than relying on government regulation?

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| --- |
| 1. Strongly believe companies should self-regulate |
| 1. Somewhat believe companies should self-regulate |
| 1. Neutral — no preference between self-regulation and government regulation |
| 1. Somewhat believe government regulation is needed |
| 1. Strongly believe government regulation is needed |
| 1. Don’t know |

Q21. To what extent do you agree or disagree that co-regulation, where governments, independent ethical bodies, and companies collaborate to set and enforce standards for AI companions, is an effective approach to ensure safety and ethical use?

1. Strongly agree
2. Tend to agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Tend to disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don’t know

Q22. Overall, do you feel AI companions are generally a positive or negative addition to society?

1. Very positive
2. Somewhat positive
3. Neutral – neither positive nor negative
4. Somewhat negative
5. Very negative
6. Don’t know

**Results**

Full survey results are in the Excel file called ‘UKAttitudesToAICompanionsSurveyData xlsx’.

A discussion of these results will be available in published journal papers.

**References**

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